

# Annual Report

TWO THOUSAND FIVE • MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND



**As we look back on another year,** we can take pride in our accomplishments and look forward with confidence that the solid foundation we've built for this community will remain strong well into the future. However, without a doubt, several challenges lie ahead.

We have moved Montgomery forward from the quiet suburban commuter community that it once was to the exciting, diverse and bustling community that it is today with top notch schools, first-class entertainment, high-tech jobs, and exceptional conference facilities. While developing exciting new urban centers, we have led the nation in preserving pristine parkland and agricultural open spaces. One-third of the County is protected to remain as green space that future generations will still be able to enjoy.

**More than 85,000 jobs have been created since 1994,** an increase of more than 20 percent. Our economy is strong, and our unemployment rate remains one of the lowest in the state of Maryland.

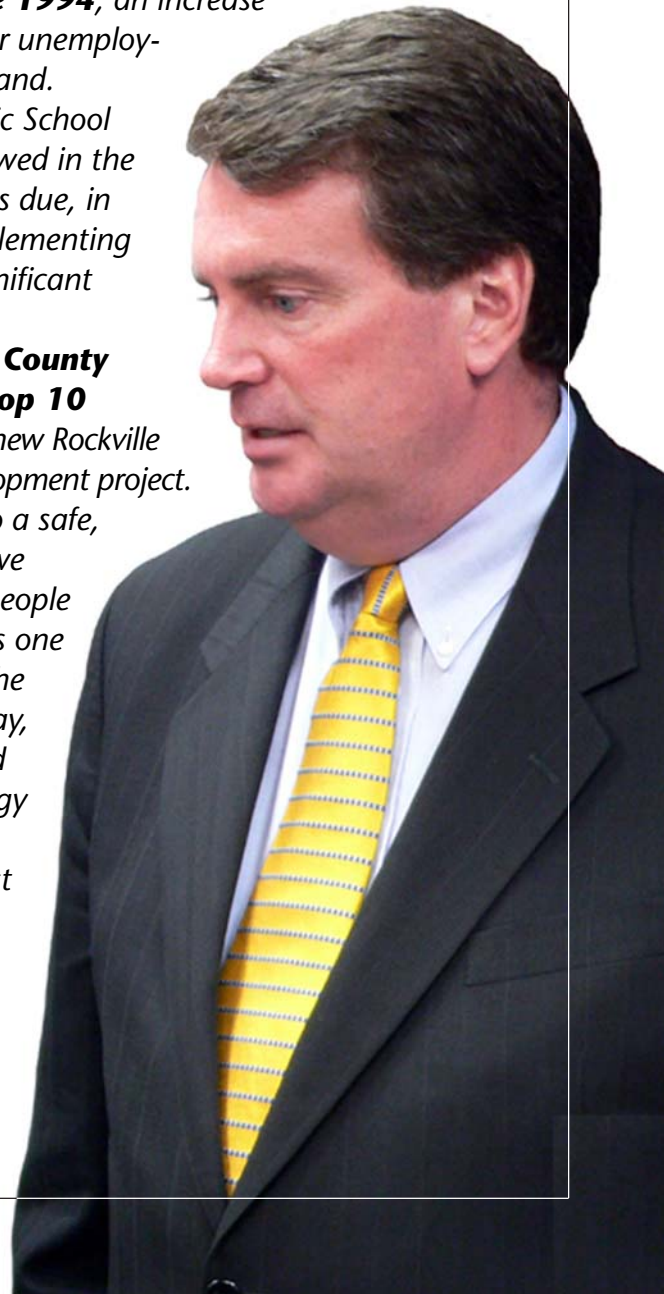
Test scores are rising in the Montgomery County Public School system, and the minority achievement gap is being narrowed in the largest and most diverse school system in the state. This is due, in large part, to our focus on early childhood initiatives, implementing all-day kindergarten, reducing class sizes and making significant investments in our teachers and support workers.

**For the third consecutive year, the Montgomery County public library system has been ranked among the top 10 libraries in the nation.** Ground was also broken for the new Rockville Library, the show piece of the Rockville Town Square redevelopment project.

Like you, I believe that everyone should have access to a safe, clean and affordable place to call home and that is why we have worked so hard to preserve and create housing for people of limited means. Our dedicated Housing Initiative Fund is one of the largest housing trust funds of any municipality in the United States. In an effort to help save the Chesapeake Bay, we have overseen the clean-up of 30 miles of streams and waterways under our innovative Stream Protection Strategy that is hailed as a model by the Environmental Protection Agency. Additionally, this past year, we became the largest local government purchaser of wind energy in the nation. Use of this renewable energy will result in cleaner air for everyone who lives and works in the region.

Some highlights of our accomplishments during the past year include:

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# A Strong Economy

In promoting strategic public/private partnerships, we have transformed the County with projects like the Bethesda North Marriott Hotel and Conference Center, the world-class Music Center at Strathmore, and new town center developments in Rockville and Germantown.

The Bethesda North Marriott Hotel and Conference Center opened in December as the result of an \$80 million public/private partnership. The 35,000-square-foot state-of-the-art facility is turning a profit ahead of schedule, already has bookings into 2009 and fills a major void in the region for meeting space, conferences and other large events.

**The Silver Spring Innovation Center, the County's second business incubator that opened during the year, provides low cost office space and services for start-up technology companies.**

The Maryland Technology Development Center, the County's first high-tech business incubator, honored eight graduating companies during the year. All have remained in the County, employing a total of 165 people. Plans are underway for a small and minority business incubator that would focus on non-technology companies.

The new Music Center at Strathmore, which opened in February, offers world-class performances by major national artists of folk, blues, pop, jazz, show tunes, and classical music. The Music Center is adjacent to a new 1,500-space parking garage, which also serves transit users at the Grosvenor-Strathmore Metrorail Station.



A new pedestrian walkway connects the garage with the Music Center.

**Revitalization of the County's older, established communities remains a key component to moving Montgomery forward**, and the downtown Wheaton district is currently undergoing improvements stemming from more than \$100 million in public/private investments there.

During the year, Montgomery County signed an agreement to develop the National Park Seminary Historic District with a mix of historic renovation and new construction of single-family, multi-family and rental homes.

# Homeland Security and Public Safety

This past year, a new Montgomery County Department of Homeland Security was launched to manage the increasing complexity of programs that keep the community safe. The department is responsible for emergency management, disaster preparedness, the security of County facilities, public health emergency preparedness, community outreach efforts, and grants and other funding for homeland security efforts.

**Major crimes in the County dropped by 14 percent last year**, compared to the year before. Overall, the County's crime rate decreased nearly five percent, and Public safety issues were addressed, including teen driver safety, pedestrian safety and gangs.

The Joint County Gang Prevention Task Force with Prince George's County presented recommendations for tackling the issue by focusing on prevention, suppression and intervention solutions. A gang hotline was established at 240-777-1245 (TTY 240-777-1295) to help parents and teens with information about gang prevention and intervention services.

To stop the spate of teen driving deaths in the region that started in October, the County launched a public awareness campaign that included parent/teen driving agreements and tips for parents on the County website, greater police presence around schools and County support for state bills mandating increased time for supervised learning for young drivers, a ban on teen cell phone use, and passenger restrictions.

Last year, in conjunction with a regional "Street Smart" campaign to reduce pedestrian and bicyclist deaths and injuries, Montgomery County stepped up its own pedestrian safety awareness campaign. The efforts included advertising and local education events, along with police crackdowns on traffic violations at locations with the greatest number of pedestrian incidents.

**A new Adult and Juvenile Drug Court was opened** during the year to handle cases involving drug-addicted offenders. The new program is expected to reduce the recidivism rate for criminal offenders.

The County's first uniformed Fire Chief was appointed last year, with full authority over all fire, rescue and emergency medical services – including services by local volunteer fire and rescue departments. A new law that took effect January 1, 2005, established the new position and eliminated the previous Fire Administrator position in an effort to make the fire service more efficient and effective.

# Education

**Newsweek magazine ranked all of Montgomery County's public high schools in the nation's top three percent** during the year, and student SAT scores were again the highest in the state.

This year, we provided funding for all-day kindergarten in an additional 20 schools, bringing the total to 93 schools. We also funded a full complement of educational facilities officers in all 24 high school clusters.



# Health Care



**To combat rising health care costs**, we implemented MontgomeryRx, a discount prescription drug card plan that is saving residents an average of 20 percent on medications. It is estimated that in the first year, County residents will save \$1 million on their purchases of prescription medications.

Montgomery Cares is a major expansion of health care for the uninsured, nearly quadrupling the number of people served through a network of private health clinics over the next five years.

**A new information and referral line** for the County Department of Health and Human Services now provides a single number to give residents easy access to information about services available through the County.

# Transportation

**Ride On continues to expand** services and attract new passengers, and this year, set a new ridership record with more than 25 million passengers – an increase of more than 2 million from last year. This year, the Ride On bus fleet became 100 percent accessible to people with disabilities, and the new U-Pass program gives Montgomery College students unlimited use of the Ride On bus system. Sixteen percent of the Ride On fleet now consists of clean fuel compressed natural gas buses. The Free Wheeling program provided free rides on 16 routes to encourage residents to take Ride On to Metro and relieve traffic congestion on busy routes. And, a major expansion of Ride On bus service in Germantown is accommodating this growing community's need for better transit access between its residential, retail and commercial areas.

**Passage of new taxi reform legislation** dramatically changed the way taxicabs are regulated in Montgomery County by increasing competition and improving service to customers.

Montgomery County was recognized this year as one of the Best Workplaces for Commuters by a national program established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Construction began on the Forest Glen Pedestrian Bridge, an elevated walkway that will be located on the west side of Georgia Avenue between Locust Grove Road and Forest Glen Road, spanning three Capital Beltway ramps. The project will greatly improve pedestrian safety, access to transit, and community interconnectedness.





# Affordable Housing

**Plans for one hundred new affordable housing units on County-owned property were set in motion** during the year. Sixty-five of these units will be built on a prime piece of real estate in downtown Bethesda at the corner of Woodmont and Bethesda Avenues. Executive orders were also signed transferring four County-owned properties to the Department of Housing and Community Affairs (DHCA) for use or sale as affordable housing. Additional affordable housing was created or preserved through our Housing Initiative Fund and in partnership with the Housing Opportunities Commission.



# Environment

**During the year, the County endorsed passage of an air quality bill** in the Maryland General Assembly to limit emissions from coal-fired power plants. These emissions cause serious health effects and pollution of the Chesapeake Bay. In March, the County approved a “Clean Energy Rewards” program that gives incentives to residents who use clean, renewable energy, including wind power, energy from landfill gas, and solar energy.

The County’s Recycling Center won two awards — the 2004 gold medal for recycling excellence from the Solid Waste Association of North America and the 2005 Material Recovery Facility of the Year Award from the Solid Waste Processing Division of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.



Marking the 25th anniversary of Montgomery County’s award-winning agricultural preservation program, new initiatives to further strengthen agriculture were launched. **The Farmland Preservation Report rated Montgomery County first in the nation in preserving farmland**, with more than 61,000 acres already protected. And, under the County’s Legacy Open Space, the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission acquired four more major properties.

# Other Accomplishments

The Round House Theatre opened its new Education Center in August 2004 in downtown Silver Spring. It houses education and outreach programs and is the primary site of the theatre’s year-round performance and process-based classes for all ages.

**Montgomery County re-opened the Working Parents Assistance Program** after the Maryland Department of Human Resources imposed a freeze on the state-funded Purchase of Care program. The revitalized program will serve an additional 110 children – helping working families gain access to quality child care.

Two new day laborer center sites were announced – one in Wheaton and one in Gaithersburg – to give workers a more orderly system to connect with employers. Some job training classes, as well as ESOL classes, will also be offered.

Looking back on the many accomplishments of the past year – and throughout the past decade – I want to credit the many outstanding public servants who work hard to provide high quality services for the best possible value, the outstanding public safety workers who put their lives on the line for us every day, and our residents who contribute so much to the community life. It is this sharing of knowledge and cultures, concern for others, and donation of time and resources that makes Montgomery County the first-class community that it is.

Douglas M. Duncan, County Executive



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